

Explorations in Teacher Education

JALT Teacher Education SIG Newsletter

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Online version: <http://jalt.org/main/publications>

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And now a word from...The Editor

Hello and welcome to Volume 13, Issue 2 of Explorations in Teacher Education, the newsletter of the Teacher Education Special Interest Group (TE SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teachers (JALT).

In the last issue I stated that the spring issue would be in late April, the summer issue would be in late July and the autumn issue would be in October. Well, as you can see this has become the summer issue and it is mid-June, so, sorry about that. In my defense I have to mention that there was a severe lack of contributions by late April, so there was very little choice but to delay this issue.

The timing of this issue has worked out quite well because the TE SIG Annual Retreat is at the end of July and so we can publicize that in a timely fashion. More specific information about the retreat can be found on page 8, on the web at www.kokusai.aichi-edu.ac.jp/ter/ter.html or by contacting Anthony Robins at anthonyrobins@yahoo.com. Some information about our involvement at the JALT 2005 Conference in Shizuoka can be found on page 28.

This issue we have four articles, a conference report, a membership report and the second in the series of interviews with Assistant English Teachers (AETs). The first article, by Mark Rebeck, is called "Proactivators" and is aimed at getting those reticent Japanese students talking. Next, is an article about supervision and appraisal by James King. Steve Darn's thought-provoking article, "Who Are You – A Mingle Activity for Trainer Trainers," also deals with teacher training. The last of the articles, by regular contributor Paul Tanner, is about teaching writing. I found this one particularly useful as I have just begun to teach writing again this academic year after a three-year hiatus. Thanks, Paul, and keep up the good work. This is followed by the second in a series of interviews with current or former Japan Exchange Teacher (JET) program Assistant English Teachers (AETs). This issue features an interview with Iain Gallacher. The JALT Pan-SIG 2005 Conference took place on May 14th and 15th and the theme was Lifelong Learning. I attended a number of interesting presentations at the conference and thoroughly enjoyed myself. Michelle Segger provides a brief conference report. Membership information as of April this year can be seen on page 15.

Hope you enjoy this tardy issue of Explorations in Teacher Education.

Simon Lees, Editor

Proactivators: Simple Solutions for Better Classroom Interaction

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Do you put a lot of energy into your lessons but feel disappointed by a general reticence and unresponsiveness of some students who don't ask questions, take forever to find a partner, and return a question with silence and a nervous grin in place of an oral response? Rather than not appreciating a teacher's efforts, such student passivity may be because they have not been taught three basic facilitators of communication, which I call Proactivators.

Once the students are using these Proactivators, you may see emerge a more proactive and interactive class with members who are, for example, confident enough to point out a teacher's spelling mistake, initiate pair work smoothly with the expression, "Do you want to ask me first?" instead of a diffident *yoroshiku*, and respond to a difficult question with barely a moment's hesitation. Although such proactive behaviour would probably go unnoticed in a class of Italian EFL students, it may come as a breath of fresh air to many a teacher in Japan. So what exactly are these Proactivators? Here they are listed below and illustrated in the three sections that follow:

1. Classroom language for student-teacher interaction
2. Initiation phrases for partner and mingle activities
3. An awareness of the importance of a prompt response

1. Language for student-teacher interaction

I am often amazed by Japanese students who have passed through compulsory education without picking up basic expressions necessary for student-teacher interaction. Although I have expressed the view that there is a place for Japanese in the L2 conversation lesson (Rebuck, 2004), I suspect that using Japanese for classroom management in many schools is to blame for those students who have neither the ability nor mindset to ask questions of teachers in English. Below are fifteen expressions that my students are required to learn off by heart:

1. Excuse me, I have a question.
2. I don't understand.
3. I don't know.
4. I'm sorry, I forgot.
5. Could you say that again, please?
6. Could you explain that again, please?
7. Could you speak more slowly, please?
8. What does _____ mean?

9. How do you spell that?
10. How do you pronounce this?
11. How do you say _____ in English?
12. I'm not sure what to do?
13. I don't have a partner.
14. I think you've spelt "freind" wrong.
15. What do we need to study for the test?

I allocate about fifteen minutes of the first lesson practicing these expressions and illustrating how each one can be used. To show the difference between expression 2 and 3, for example, I ask a student: "Are you a hypocrite?" If the student has not understood the question itself (and no one, in my two years of asking it, has), "I don't understand (the question)" is more appropriate. On the other hand, "I don't know" is more suitable in reply to questions such as "How many cockroaches live in my apartment?" or "How many hairs on my head?" (A wild guess in response to such a question would also, of course, be most welcome). Here are a few other examples showing how these expressions may be contextualized:

- Asking a student a question incomprehensibly fast should elicit, "Could you say that again, please?"
- Writing the word "pseudonym" on the board and asking a student to read it aloud will no doubt bring home the usefulness of "How do you pronounce this (that)".
- Expression 14 is important because I want students to feel able to contribute to the class, without necessarily being asked to. Students enjoy using this expression to point out words that I deliberately (or so I tell the students) misspell on the board during the first few lessons. Once they get accustomed to correcting the teacher, the barrier to other kinds of participation is also lowered.

No doubt you will be able to think of other ways to practice these or similar expressions.

Classroom language for student-teacher interaction needs to become part of the student's active vocabulary. Therefore, although they are grammatically simple, I still get students to chorally repeat the expressions in class as well as memorize them for homework, so that by lesson two they are capable of instantaneous production when the need arises. Once these expressions become fully integrated in to the language of the classroom, even the less motivated students will feel obliged to say, "I'm not sure what to do", rather than waiting aimlessly for the teacher to prod them into action.

2. Initiation phrases for partner and mingle activities

Teachers often begin a pair work or mingle activity expecting students to spontaneously initiate communication with one or more classmates. However, often this does not happen, especially at the beginning of the semester when the two sexes seem to defy mixing like the proverbial oil and water. I have found that when students have been taught the expressions in the table below, interaction proceeds much more smoothly:

Pair work	Mingle activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● OK, I'll ask you first.● Do you want to start by asking me?● You can ask me first.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Can I ask you a question?● Go ahead and ask me.● Have I asked you yet?

Pre-teaching these expressions provides students with an opening line to break the ice when they sit down with their partner or circulate around the classroom (mingle activity). Moreover, for shy students, these expressions may help by formalizing the activity. Being able to say "You can ask me first" when faced with a partner of, for example, the opposite sex can provide reassurance to those who feel comfortable only if the interaction can be clearly delineated as being within the bounds of language practice. In other words the expressions are, for certain students, a reassuring signal that "this is nothing personal".

I incorporate a simple pair work and mingle activity into lesson 1 to provide students with a chance to practice these expressions. A mingle activity perfect for the first lesson is the popular *find someone who...*

3. An awareness of the importance of a prompt response

Many of us have experienced what of Mulligan calls "the agonizing period of silence" (Mulligan, 2005) when a question is met with a long pause. I tell my students that I call these pauses *mazui ma* (an uncomfortable space or silence) to emphasize what they inflict on a questioner left stranded by one.

So why do some students take tens of seconds to reply, while still others would let their pause stretch on for eternity if the teacher were not there to break the silence? Some reasons for the *mazui ma* include students:

1. mentally translating the teacher's question and/ or their own answer
2. not understanding a question
3. understanding the question but feeling embarrassed to answer
4. being unaware that long pauses are not common in English communication

In the first lesson I jump (not, as yet, literally) on the first student whose response is overly delayed and use it as an opportunity for a short sermon on why the long pause, though

perhaps valued in Japan, can seriously inhibit communication with people from *eigo ken* (English speaking) countries. By setting a five-second time limit for a reply and moving to another student if it is not met, I have found that within a few lessons most students learn to reply to any question with a minimum of hesitation.

It is important to note here that *answering* a question is not the same as *responding* or *replying* to one. Even if a student, for some reason, is unable to provide an answer, he or she can give a reply. “Don’t ask me now, I’m using my *Keita*” is for me preferable to silence! A short essay on the importance of a prompt response, which I give to my first year university students as a homework reading, is included in the appendix.

As mentioned earlier, it is important, I believe, to introduce the three Proactivators in the first lesson because they provide one of the fundamental catalysts for interaction from there on in. Of course, in subsequent lessons students will need to be reminded of them; constant reminding will condition even a student with the most intractable case of “eternal-pause syndrome” to reply promptly. One word of warning: this conditioning can sometimes be too effective causing a rebound phenomenon of students replying, “I don’t know” even before the teacher has finished the question. Fortunately this is rare.

Appendix 1

When silence is not always golden

Many non-Japanese English teachers find it confusing when questions they ask Japanese students are met with silence. For example, in one of my first lessons at this university I asked a student, “What’s your father’s occupation?” She didn’t say anything, but instead did the following things. Firstly, she thought for a number of seconds (I assumed she was thinking because of the serious expression on her face). Then she gazed into her textbook. Next, she turned and whispered to the classmate sitting beside her. Finally, she looked at me with a slightly embarrassed expression. The student had spent around twenty seconds searching for an answer, and during the entire time she had not uttered a word to me. This long pause made me feel quite uncomfortable.

So, why hadn’t this student answered me? Maybe she hadn’t understood my question; the word “occupation” is more difficult than “job”, which has a similar meaning. It could have been that her father was unemployed and she felt embarrassed to say anything. He might even have been a member of the Japanese secret service and she wasn’t allowed to reveal this to anyone! However, whatever the reason, it was impossible for me to interpret her silence. I needed her to say something.

In many English-speaking countries it is usual to reply to a question without a long pause, but in Japanese culture it is not always necessary to reply immediately to a question immediately. In fact, replying too hastily may show that a person hasn't thought enough about their reply. Also, in Japan not responding is sometimes a way to tacitly signal that, "I 'm not able to answer your question". However, foreigners who are not aware of this cultural difference may jump to the conclusion that Japanese who don't reply are being unfriendly or are just stupid.

It is important to remember that there is a difference between *answering a question* and *responding to a question*. Even if you don't know the answer to a question, you can, and should, respond in some way. In the above example, the student could have responded to "What's your father's occupation?" by saying:

- 1) "I don't understand the question" (If she hadn't understood the question at all).
- 2) "Sorry, I didn't hear the question, once more please?" (If she hadn't caught the question for some reason).
- 3) "I don't understand "occupation" or "What does occupation mean?" (If she didn't understand the key word 'occupation').
- 4) "I don't know my father's occupation. I know he works in an office, but I'm not sure what he does exactly" (if she understood the question but didn't know the exact answer).
- 5) "How do you say *koumuin* in English?" (If her teacher spoke Japanese and knew the word for 'civil servant')
- 6) "Can you give me a few seconds to think?" (If she just needed a few seconds to recall the word in English).
- 7) "I'd rather not answer the question" or "It's a secret" (If, for some reason, the student didn't want to tell the teacher and/or the class).

So, remember that there are so many replies you can give, even if you don't know the answer or can't give one immediately. Generally, *any reply is better than silence*. In order to achieve smooth communication with people from many other societies, it is important that you get used to responding to questions quickly. I did a small survey and found that native English speakers usually respond to a question in less than five seconds. Why don't you ask a question to a native speaker and see how long he or she takes to reply. It will probably be under five seconds.

No one is expecting you to answer a question if you don't know the answer, but you can and should *respond* in some way. Responding quickly is one of the ways to achieve more natural communication.

Remember: Your goal should be to reply to a question in less than 5 seconds.

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The Teacher Education SIG 2005 Retreat

Will be held from July 30th to August 1st. It will take place at Aichi University of Education in Kariya, east of Nagoya, with economical accommodation at nearby AiPlaza, Kariya. This year's focus is *Teaching Cultures*, as classes, including those now developing at elementary schools, have to balance language and culture/international understanding.

Through presentations and workshops, we will look at developing materials (from elementary school to tertiary level), which combine: 1) more than a shallow look at countries' cultures, 2) successful interaction between language learning and cultural education, and 3) engaging activities for learners and teachers. It's a chance too for participants to take in the nearby 2005 Aichi International Expo and see how various cultures are portrayed at the international pavilions. Interested? For more details see www.kokusai.aichi-edu.ac.jp/ter/ter.html or contact Anthony Robins anthonycrobins@yahoo.com.

Sessions include:

Oliver Mayer (Aichi University of Education) from *Germany* on introducing a country at elementary school

Tony Ryan (Aichi University of Education) from *Australia* on introducing a country through successful study abroad programs

Brian Cullen (Nagoya Institute of Technology) from *Ireland* on developing and improving a coursebook on a country's culture and history

Supervision and appraisal through classroom observation: Time for a change of approach

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Introduction

I apologise for any anxiety caused. I hope that the inclusion of such terrifying words as 'supervision', 'appraisal' and 'classroom observation' in the title has not triggered a nervous reaction amongst any readers. Why is it that these themes are invariably associated with threat and unpleasantness? They do not have to be. Indeed, what many teachers regard as management's instruments of terror can actually be the source of invaluable opportunities for learning and professional growth.

This paper will reflect on how the dual processes of supervision and performance appraisal through classroom observation can have both beneficial and detrimental effects upon individual teachers and their organisations as a whole. By adopting a less controlling, more collaborative and learning-orientated approach towards these procedures; mutually beneficial outcomes, such as increased long-term viability for the organisation and genuine professional development for the teacher can result.

Although this paper acknowledges that supervision and appraisal can be considered as entirely separate and distinct processes, it has been this author's experience in EFL education that invariably the two practices have been performed concurrently by the same individual or individuals and have been centred on classroom observations. This phenomenon is especially likely within organisations with limited resources. The paper will therefore take the stance that supervision and performance appraisal can be considered as interchangeable and will not seek to emphasise the differences between the two.

Balancing the books

An area in which supervision and performance appraisal through classroom observation can be seen to have both a positive and negative effect is in the maintenance of an organisation's viability. Stacey (1996) asserts that organisations use ordinary management processes, which include supervision and appraisal in the positivist, controlling sense, to deal with short-term, predictable change. Negative feedback (feedback that restores anomalous behaviour back to a prescribed norm) and single-loop learning (learning that fails to challenge values or beliefs) cause the members of an organisation to perpetuate established ideologies and methodologies, therefore maintaining the status quo (Delahaye, 2002). In

other words, aberrant behaviour is dampened down by the process of supervision and appraisal. This is essential in terms of maintaining the day-to-day operations of an organisation (Delahaye, 2000, p.395). Its 'books are balanced' in the present time and short-term viability is preserved. Unfortunately, this style of supervision and appraisal, which focuses on accountability, does not address the dilemmas posed by more chaotic, long-term change.

The smothering of creativity

Problems arise when the organisation is faced with a more unpredictable and unstable external environment, such as the ever-more competitive tertiary education market in Japan. Stacey's (1996) belief that there are different types of change (closed, contained and open-ended) highlights that not all discontinuity can be successfully planned for and negotiated. It is when organisations are faced with the need for open-ended change and innovation that the homogenising effects of a controlling approach to supervision and developmental appraisal are felt most. Kirkbride, Durcan and Obeng's (1994) belief that change is chaotic and non-linear serves to emphasise that negative feedback, single-loop learning inspired supervision and appraisal can only be damaging to an organisation's long-term vitality as it smothers the creativity needed to deal effectively with such discontinuity. Enforced standardisation is a potent enemy of flexibility and adaptability.

Going through the motions

In their enlightening study of 114 elementary and secondary school teachers' perspectives on supervision, Zepeda and Ponticell (1998) highlight the phenomenon of supervision as a meaningless routine. Their description of it as "...a shallow and hollow ritual in which neither teacher nor supervisor was invested and from which nothing meaningful or useful resulted" (Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998, p.79) directly mirrors Gouldner's (1964) idea of 'mock' bureaucracies (Gouldner cited in Stacey, 1996, p.380). In such organisations the appearance of rationality and order is maintained by paying lip service to the bureaucracy's set rules and procedures. In the case of some of Zepeda and Ponticell's subjects, this included cursory classroom evaluations where filling in the evaluation form was what mattered most (Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998, p.80).

An added danger of this approach is that even if some form of appraisal takes place, no feedback may be given and opportunities for communication, learning and development are lost. Educational organisations in Japan in particular need to be aware of such a hazard. Indeed, in their in-depth investigation into current Japanese management methods, Jackson and Tomioka (2004, pp.164-165) relate that this uncommunicative form of supervision and

appraisal is endemic within Japanese companies and negatively influences employees' views on the practices.

Dogs, ponies and their consequences

Even if supervision and appraisal are carried out with the full participation of both teacher and supervisor, the process can still produce a meaningless outcome. A teacher's ability to meet pre-ordained criteria within an observed class does not necessarily mean that 'good' teaching has occurred. This idea of a "dog and pony show" (Zepeda & Ponticell, 1998, p.77) is encapsulated in the notion of teachers correctly demonstrating a series of educational techniques that appear on supervisors' checklists. Again, behavior which is deemed to be aberrant is quashed by negative feedback and single-loop learning. This approach fails to take into account any form of context. It ignores the specific needs of the students and how an individual teacher may be attempting to meet these needs. This approach encourages mandated curricula which lead to the "...de-skilling of teachers and loss of caring about their work" (Wildy & Wallace, 1997, p.134). Such practices create a culture of compliancy instead of a culture of innovation. This in turn can only result in a demotivated workforce as teaching becomes akin to "...the degraded work of manual workers" (Hargreaves cited in Wildy & Wallace, 1997, p.145).

Less control, more learning

The approaches to supervision and developmental appraisal through classroom observation outlined above are counter-productive because they are based on a hierarchical, controlling style of management. They create stability and equilibrium within the organisation. Eventually, this stability drags the organisation into a state of toxicity as it becomes unable to cope with discontinuity (Stacey, 1996). This idea is echoed by Limerick, Cunnington and Crowther (2002) in their description of the 'organisational flywheel' through which "...the organisation becomes what the organisation does – identity and metastrategy become crystallised in action" (Limerick, Cunnington & Crowther, 2002, p.175).

Therefore a different approach to supervision and appraisal through classroom observation is obviously needed. A movement away from the controlling aspects of these processes and their use of negative feedback and single loop-learning towards a more facilitative and knowledge generating method is necessary. Senge (1997) emphasises this need with his assertion that organisations become more successful through being less controlling and more learning-orientated. Such organisations constantly create and share new knowledge (Senge, 1997, p.32). This can only be done by adopting a less hierarchical structure in which the free flow of knowledge is encouraged. Supervision and appraisal provide ideal opportunities for knowledge to flow freely in all directions within an organisation.

Taking over the process

Down, Chadbourne and Hogan (2000) touch upon this theme in their description of authentic teacher learning amongst a group of high school teachers who had been introduced to compulsory performance management. These teachers acknowledged that they learned best from spontaneous, non-structured, informal discussions. It was through such interactions with their peers that the teachers were able to change and improve their practices and not as a result of being managed and monitored by others (Down, Chadbourne & Hogan, 2000, p.219).

The fact that the teachers in Down et al.'s (2000) study managed to take over the process of supervision and developmental appraisal to suit their students' and their own needs shows that these processes can be beneficial to both individuals and organisations as a whole. The use of peer supervision through team teaching is a particularly good example of how a less threatening, non-judgemental system of development can be utilised to create positive learning outcomes. Such approaches make good use of positive feedback and double-loop learning which encourage creativity and stimulate feelings of empowerment for teachers.

The need to flatten and facilitate

It is apparent that the quality of an employee's experience of supervision and appraisal depends greatly on the approach taken by the individual who performs these tasks. It is also dependent upon the structure of the organisation that the participants inhabit. Increasingly in the west, organisations are operating with flatter hierarchies thus making it ever more likely that supervision and appraisal will be carried out by individuals who do not possess positional labels of authority. The emergence of these individuals highlights that leadership does not necessarily come from the top and flow downwards. It can be an "organisation-wide phenomenon" (Crowther, 1997, para 15). It could be argued that supervision and appraisal systems are better received in such 'flatter' organisations because they are not imposed from above and are more likely to result in positive developmental outcomes. The challenge for schools and universities in Japan is how to adopt such an approach when society as a whole is so dependent upon the predictability of hierarchical social relations.

Barely managing to lead

This shift in our conception of leadership highlights the differences between leading and managing. Leading should be thought of as the use of "facilitative behaviour" (Limerick et al., 2002, p.222) to inspire transformation, learning and empowerment. Managing, on the other hand, is more allied with notions of control and manipulation in order to create predictability and order (Mellors, 1996). It therefore follows that supervision and appraisal that aims to be

developmental would be more effectively carried out and well received if it was performed by an individual who possessed facilitative leadership skills. Conversely, individuals who are more adept at the manipulative role of managing would be better able to perform evaluative or summative assessments. As outlined above, both of these approaches are necessary. The controlling aspect - in order to maintain an organisation's present time, short-term viability and the developmental aspect – in order to guarantee long-term viability and the ability to handle unpredictable discontinuity. It is unfortunate that most organisations do not have the resources to be able to treat these two functions separately. As Townsend (1998) points out, it is usually the same person who carries out both tasks. Consequently, an inherent tension has traditionally been associated with supervision and appraisal.

Collaboration and trust

It is only by allowing individuals to take a more active role in their own and their colleagues' processes of supervision and appraisal that Withall and Wood's (cited in Smyth, 1991) idea of supervision implying "...a situation that is unpleasant, possesses psychological threat, and typically culminates in unrewarding consequences" (p.2) can be avoided. A movement towards more participatory supervision and appraisal practices would also encourage more openness in the processes. These moves would serve to challenge individuals' hegemonic assumptions of supervision and appraisal as being purely negative or threatening.

It is apparent that the process of supervision and appraisal can only be successful and well received if it is undertaken within an environment of trust. Townsend (1998) underlines this belief with her assertion that for appraisal to achieve its goals "...a climate of trust within a culture of cooperation and collaboration is an environmental sine qua non" (p.47). The close interactions that occur within the process of appraisal can increase levels of trust. The more communication that occurs, the less likely it is that conflict will ensue and higher levels of trust will result (Delahaye, 2000, p.153).

Even so, the fostering of such a trusting environment is not an entirely painless process. The relinquishing of control can be especially difficult for individuals in positions of authority who may have built up their careers by working within the confines of a traditionally hieratical structure. A possible solution to such inertia for change is the adoption of a 360-degree feedback system for management such as the one described by Yukl and Lepsinger (1995). By using this multidirectional, personal and positive method of appraisal, managers could receive the necessary stimulus from their subordinates to change their entrenched mindset.

Conclusion

Supervision and appraisal need not necessarily equate with threat and unpleasantness. If conducted with a high degree of trust and openness by people who seek to empower rather than control, supervision and appraisal can result in continued organisational viability. The individual can benefit too from the positive learning outcomes that result from the processes. The most important point to remember though is that supervision and appraisal systems are all about people. As a consequence, the most successful ones "...seek to empower people and are necessarily based on respect for people" (Cousens & Cousens cited in Delahaye, 2000, p.153).

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TE SIG Membership Information

As of April 2005 the TE SIG had 158 members. 120 of the members are foreigners, that is, non-Japanese. Three members do not reside in Japan, those members live in the UK, the US and India. The membership stretches from as far north as Hokkaido and as far south as Kagoshima. Currently, there are no members living in Okinawa. The best-represented area is, of course, Tokyo with 29 members, while Aichi has 15 members.

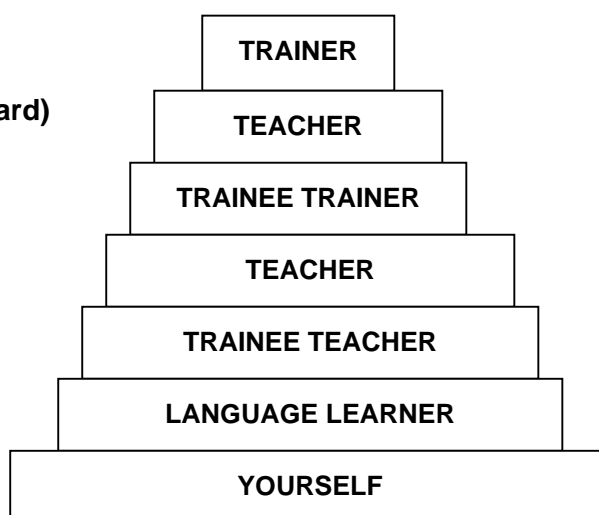
Who Are You? A Mingle Activity for Trainer Trainers

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Like many who are involved in training trainers, I also train and help to develop teachers and, rightly, teach learners of English in a standard classroom setting. Those of us who teach at three levels, sometimes all on the same day, are constantly fighting a battle in terms of psychological preparation for the level at which we are about to teach, as well as the lessons or sessions which are appropriate to our audiences. Not only do we have to leave our personal baggage outside the classroom door, but also the baggage that we accumulated in a teaching or training event which may have ended only hours or even minutes earlier. Meanwhile we adopt the appropriate persona for the task in hand while desperately trying to hang on to our own self image.

Such is the psychological angst of operating at a number of different levels of what is now commonly termed the 'stack', and while loop input is a useful tool and parallels between teaching and training become increasingly obvious with experience, this constant adjustment of approach, content and persona together with the intrinsic need to come up with new ideas is an inevitable contributor to stress, strain and potential burnout.

The Stack
(after Tessa Woodward)



Psychological preparation is a requirement for any new job or facet of a profession, but even more necessary if the professional is to do his or her old job as well. This is a vertical rather than a horizontal integrative process requiring skills such as multi-tasking, multi-level thinking capabilities and an enormous degree of flexibility as well as the accumulation of new knowledge. It is often said that there are many excellent teachers who are unable to make

the quantum leap to training, and even that there are some highly regarded trainers who were no more than average classroom teachers. Perhaps it is a case of knowing one's own limits and capabilities, but this needs to be made clear to all prospective trainers.

In light of the above, the following is a task designed to raise awareness of the adjustments required at different levels of the stack and to begin to demonstrate the modification of content between levels required for effective loop input.

Procedure

The task sheet and the cue cards for this activity can be found at the end of the article.

The activity is in three distinct stages. Preferably, each stage should be conducted separately, tasks being divided by either cutting or folding the task sheet to avoid distraction. Each stage is a standard 'find someone who' mingle activity. Participants should be given clear instructions as to the questions to be asked, and for the second stage the contents of the cue cards and the affirmative and negative answer need to be drilled quickly. Most teachers are not too uncomfortable with basic French, but a less common language might be used for greater effect.

Participants should be given a few minutes for each stage, longer if the task also performs a 'getting to know you' function in the early stages of a course. Completion of the task is not vital.

Feedback

Feedback on the task needs to be clearly staged, and I have found the following structure useful:

1. General comment on enjoyment and difficulty. Ask trainees whether they enjoyed the task, which parts they found relatively easy or difficult, and how they felt in each stage, particularly when they were asked to work in another language.
2. Implications for teaching. Ask trainees how language learners feel when asked to do mingle activities, and which parts of the task would have been appropriate for the classroom. Ask about the aims of such activities. Discuss the task design and the necessity for clear instructions which also need to be checked.
3. Who are you? Ask trainees who they were in each stage of the task. Trainees should be able to come up with 'themselves', 'language learners' and 'teachers', and that as teachers they were still learners, and still themselves. Introduce the concept of 'the stack'.

4. Discuss content. Ask trainees to relate the content of each stage to the role they were asked to take on, and to comment on whether the content defined the role and whether the content was appropriate at each stage. Ask which stage of the activity had been most relevant to them and why.

Feedback may be quite extensive, and will provide opportunities to introduce concepts fundamental to training. It is likely that the subject of simulations will come up, offering the opportunity to explain that while simulations may be appropriate to the classroom, that modifications of content need to be made at different levels of the stack in order to be entirely relevant. This is the time to introduce the notion of parallels between learning, teaching and training, and the content-base of loop input. Depending on the situation, it may also be possible to elicit a more comprehensive definition of loop input as a training tool.

Finally, attention should be drawn to the difficulty of changing roles from teacher to trainer, and the psychological preparation involved.

I have found this activity to be a very useful introduction to a number of very basic yet difficult concepts in training whilst performing all the functions of a normal mingle activity. Possibly a good starting point for a course.

Cue Cards

**un
chat**

**une maison a
la campagne**

**une amie
japonnaise**

**une
bicyclette**

**une
voiture**

**beaucoup
d'argent**

Task Sheet

FIND SOMEONE WHO (CHERCHEZ QUELQU'UN(E) QUI)

By asking information questions (not yes/no questions), find someone who:

- has lived and worked in more than one country
- has not always worked in education
- speaks more than one foreign language
- works in a university
- doesn't smoke
- travels to work by bus

La question est 'avez vous?' Cherchez quelqu'un(e) qui a:

- un chat
- une maison a la campagne
- une amie japonnaise
- une bicyclette
- une voiture
- beaucoup d'argent

By asking the question 'What is/are?', find someone who:

- can name the stages of a PPP lesson
- can define a homophone
- can briefly explain the lexical approach
- can remind you of the word for a short activity to start a lesson with
- can tell you the difference between a lecture and a seminar
- can tell you what a phrasal verb is

Before The Pen Reaches The Paper: Thinking About Writing

Paul D. Tanner, Nagoya City University, <pdtanner@hum.nagoya-cu.ac.jp>

At the beginning of another school year, I found myself teaching a writing class for sophomore students majoring in intercultural studies. English courses are a key component of their curriculum, and the students possess at least an intermediate level of English based on median TOEIC scores of 548.

One goal for the first class was to introduce a metacognitive element. One of the points introduced by Joy Reid in *Pedagogical Issues in ESL Writing* provided the impetus by explaining differences between speaking and writing. (Only the instructor had read Reid's explanation.) The sixty students were divided into groups of four and asked to make a list of at least five differences between speaking and writing.

Presented here is a summary of the collective answers, followed by this author's comments. A few slight alterations for clarity and correctness have been made, but otherwise the words are as students wrote them. Student comments are written in italics and the numbers in parentheses indicate how many groups mentioned the same idea.

Writing needs more accurate grammar than speaking (9)/ we don't consider grammar as much in speaking/ must pay more attention to grammar and spelling when writing (2)/ Writing has more formal structure / We have to care more about grammar when we write/ Speaking is more casual

These are valid observations. For example, linguists estimate that more than 50% of everyday speech is composed of sentence fragments (Murphey, 1998). Reid (1993) cites studies showing that writing has a relatively greater degree of formality, greater lexical diversity, and longer sentence length. Raimes (1983) states that writing is more formal and compact, and progresses logically with fewer digressions and explanations.

Speaking uses intonation and gestures (non-verbal action) (8) / We can see expressions for communication with speaking / Through body language, we can explain our feelings well / eye contact is important in conversation

Writers must use words to convey meaning. Related to this point is the response of the conversation partner or reader. In conversation, the partner's response is usually instant; questions and clarification responses are immediate. For a writer, the reader's response is

either delayed or nonexistent (Raimes, 1983). With the delayed response, the writer has to make sure his or her writing anticipates how the reader may react and understand.

To study a foreign language you'll learn more quickly if you study from speaking rather than writing

Writing can reinforce the vocabulary and grammatical structures students have learned and promote vocabulary development. While speaking is an important skill, it can be developed through reading and writing. Krashen (2003) for example, cites studies that show that free voluntary reading is an effective way of increasing literacy and language development, improving reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar and writing (p. 15).

“Positives of Writing”

The following points raised by students can be classified as “positives” of writing, or “advantages” writing has over conversation.

Spoken words disappear, but written words remain behind / writing provides a permanent record / can't take back what you say when speaking / written words remain on paper (4) / Writing can be read many times, but speaking usually has one chance only / Writing stays, but speaking doesn't / Letters remain more certainly than sound

Writing can be improved / Writing can be corrected (3) many times / We can correct writing again and again

Writing can be done alone, but speaking needs a partner or friend / Speaking needs someone to speak to / Writing is one-way, but speaking is interactive

Writing allows for time to think, but speaking has less time to think / speaking has no time

Writing is easier to use a dictionary with / you can use a dictionary when writing

Need more courage to speak

As a solo activity, writers can work at their own pace. Shyness is not a concern as it is in conversation. A writer can go back and check his / her work as many times as necessary. A writer can improve quality efficiently by using the computer spell-check, grammar correction, and on-line dictionaries and translation software. Improvement in writing is more systematic and is easier to document than is conversation ability. Writing is planned whereas speaking

is usually spontaneous and unplanned (Raimes, 1983). More importantly, perhaps, writing allows for more time to think, reflect, and edit than does conversation.

Additional teacher comments

While students brought up some excellent observations, there were a few ideas this instructor wanted to bring up to round out class observations of writing in comparison with speaking.

1. Virtually everyone acquires a native language early in life, naturally. Writing and reading are learned skills. Not everyone learns them (Raimes, 1983).
2. Writing skills from a native language have a correlation with writing skills in a second language. Krapels (1997) cites studies which show that a lack of writing in English results more from a lack of composing competence than from a lack of linguistic competence. Krapels (1997), Eisterhold (1997), and Frielander (1997) mention a variety of studies that show that writers will transfer writing abilities and strategies, whether good or deficient, from their first to their second language.
3. Maintaining a regular writing schedule encourages more writing and the emergence of more creative ideas than does "spontaneous" writing (Boice, 1983, cited in Krashen, 2003). By participating in a class that meets regularly, students should hopefully be able to write more and develop their creativity.

Conclusion

The thoughtful and insightful answers students provided helped to make this a worthwhile activity. By thinking consciously about the writing process in comparison with speaking, students expanded their reflections about writing, realized how writing reinforces and aids the English learning process, and recognized opportunities that learning writing can provide.

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Interview with an Assistant English Teacher (AET) 2

This is the second in a series of interviews with participants or former participants in the Japan Exchange Teacher (JET) scheme. This time we have an interview with Iain Gallacher, former AET and Nagoya resident of four years.

Iain is a Canadian, from Halifax on the East coast. He worked as an AET in Nagoya for three years. He is currently working at the Nanzan International High School near Toyota, teaching English Literature.

Now to the questions:

ETE: The first question is "What is JET?"

IG: JET is the Japan Exchange Teacher scheme. The idea behind it is that the Ministry of Education and CLAIR, the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations has brought around 6500 teachers from all over the English-speaking world to Japan. They mainly come from the US, Canada, Britain, New Zealand and Australia but actually 39 countries are represented on the JET program. They hire Korean and Chinese speakers too now, so it's got quite an international feel to it. So, they come over here and are basically given a job by the Japanese government and are contracted out to Boards of Education around the country to work in public schools. This varies from an AET going to a small village in Northern Hokkaido or Okinawa to AETs going to the big cities like Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya.

ETE: How many AETs are there in Nagoya, for example?

IG: In Nagoya, there are currently 27 JETs. There used to be more...

ETE: What's the story there?

IG: Basically, in the big cities in Japan the JET program is actually dwindling.

ETE: Why is that?

IG: It's too expensive. For every AET they bring over they can hire two teachers locally. This first started in Tokyo where there was already a large foreign population and now more and more of the Boards of Education are going that way.

ETE: This is companies like Altia?

IG: Altia, Interac. Yes those are companies in the Nagoya area. They hire from abroad too, but they are less expensive. That started in Tokyo so when I came to Japan in August of 2001, there were fifteen AETs in Tokyo.

ETE: Fifteen!

IG: Yeah, at that time Nagoya had 32.

ETE: So, you came to Nagoya?

IG: I came to Nagoya. I was contracted to the Nagoya Board Of Education, so that was my home office and I was contracted out to schools all around the city.

ETE: Why did you join JET?

IG: Well, I heard of JET at university. The JET program markets itself at universities because the ideal candidates are young, fresh graduates who have just finished their degrees. I was interested in coming to Japan and traveling around Asia and I was looking for suitable employment that would allow me to do that. As it happened I didn't end up going right into JET. I went home and worked for a big bank for two years and hated it. It wasn't quite my calling in life so I decided to pick up on that idea I had back in university. I had basically decided that I wanted to come to Japan and the JET program was my first choice. I applied right across the board to a number of language schools too. I had to go for an interview in Toronto and I got in.

ETE: So, when you went for your interview in Toronto, what qualities do you think the interviewers were looking for?

IG: I think, basically, they were just looking for young people who have a certain level of education, to help them internationalize Japan at the grassroots level by putting English native speakers into their schools to deal with their children. I think they were very interested in our personalities and they wanted to see how we interacted with strangers and responded to strange questions, just to see how we would react in a foreign environment.

ETE: Did they ask you some strange questions then?

IG: Yeah, they asked me a few strange questions.

ETE: Like what?

IG: They asked me to do a little demonstration, as if I was teaching them where I was from, so I was explaining that I was from Canada and where that was in relation to Japan, and then one of them asked me if I liked kissing my girlfriend, just...out of the blue. I was like; I thought I was teaching you where Canada is. Then they stated asking me some personal questions.

ETE: Right...

IG: At the time I thought that was very strange. Having lived in Japan for four years and having had the experiences I've had I realize now that that was just training because, especially with JET and dealing with all these young kids, it's their first experience of

interacting with a foreigner and some of the questions they ask you are very odd and sometimes very personal. Sometimes they say things to you like “Oh, you’re fat,” but there’s no malice in it, they are just making an observation, but if you take offence it can be a bit difficult. So those questions, which at the interview I thought were very strange, were really just an opportunity for them to see how I would react to that sort of question. I’m sure that if I had flipped out and said, “what are you asking me those questions for,” I probably wouldn’t have got the job. So it was a test, but a relevant one because they knew from previous AETS about the questions that you sometimes get asked.

ETE: You’ve referred to “they,” so who’s “they?”

IG: Who was interviewing me? Basically it was members of the Ministry of Education. There were four interviewers, two from the Ministry of Education or CLAIR, one Japanese person resident in Toronto and one former AET. It is the former AET who leads the interview and you field questions from other members of the panel too.

ETE: Did you have any knowledge about Japan before the interview?

IG: Yeah, I was interested in Japan because I had studied Japanese history as an elective while completing my degree in History and Geography at the University of Western Ontario. I had been interested in Japan for a long time and that had lead me to take the elective. I’d never visited Japan or studied there though.

ETE: Did the panel touch on this during the interview?

IG: Yes, they did. That’s another quality they are looking for, a genuine interest in Japan. They don’t want to hear that you want to come to Japan because being an AET is a good job. They want people who are going to come here and enjoy it and take the opportunity to explore it all first hand.

ETE: So what did you say?

IG: I told them about my interest in the history of Japan and I started telling them about it. At the end of the interview they said that I knew more about Japanese history than them. I think that impressed the older Japanese guys. I think that they really want people who are going to enjoy themselves for three years so that when they finish and return to their home countries, they will act as a kind of ambassador for Japan. This is another aim of the JET program.

ETE: Did you feel prepared when you first entered the classroom?

IG: No. To be honest I think that’s part of the beauty of it. They did give us some training how to conduct an English class, and I had some idea anyway because I had done a Certificate in

Teaching English to Adults (CELTA) and taken some TESOL classes when I was at university but basically, no.

ETE: What training did they give you?

IG: Well, we arrived in early August and school starts on September 1st, so there isn't a whole lot of time. There is a four-day orientation conference in Tokyo when you first arrive but that is a bit of a whirlwind experience because you've just got off a 16-hour flight and then you're meeting hundreds of new people. Then your Board of Education takes you off to wherever you're going to go. I then had three weeks of workshops in Nagoya while I was staying with my host family and looking for an apartment. I was given a mentor teacher who was a second or third year JET working in the same school. I observed them for about a week before I actually began any classes.

ETE: So, how accurately does AET describe your role?

IG: Well, it's very important to focus on the "assistant" part of AET. Basically, I was there to help the Japanese Teacher of English (JTE). I've heard many AETs complain about the lack of control in the classroom but I think that is the JTE's role. My role was to enlighten the classroom. Whenever I met a new JTE I would say that I was there to help them. Of course, some of the JTE's just thought, great, I've got a human tape recorder.

ETE: What do you think of the JTE's you worked with?

IG: A lot of them were great teachers but a few of them weren't so good. I think that the biggest problem is that a lot of them have very low levels of English. As long as that remains the case, there will be problems. Of course, a lot of teachers don't have any choice in the matter. They just get picked to be the English teacher because they did a one-month home stay in Canada when they were in high school, or something like that.

ETE: How did the reality of the classroom differ from how you had imagined it?

IG: Well, I prefer to just go and experience things. If I don't know what something is going to be like I try not to waste energy imagining it. One thing that did cross my mind was that because the JET program officials stress that you might not end up where you want to be, I kept picturing myself teaching in a small school in a small village out in the middle of nowhere. So, the reality of my teaching situation in Nagoya was pretty different from that. In fact, in the three years I was a JET I taught in 26 different schools.

ETE: The next question is whether you have any aspirations to do with teaching. Obviously, you do, as you are still a teacher. Could you talk about that a little?

IG: Yes, I was always interested in teaching and I had done some volunteer work in schools, so I regarded the JET program as the next step to seeing whether I really wanted to be a

teacher. The one-year contract system seemed ideal. If I liked it I could renew twice and so have a three-year experience but if I didn't like it I could retire after the one year. As it happened I found it to be inspirational and so when my time as a JET was up I wanted to stay in Japan and teach in schools. I'd had a brief taste of working in an *eikaiwa* situation and found that I didn't like it. It was quite nerve-wracking because my contract expired in August, which is just the wrong time of year to be looking for a job in a school system where the year starts in April. However, I was lucky and something came up almost immediately.

ETE: Have you made any attempt to improve your qualifications?

IG: Yes, I have just applied for an MA in Education at the University of Phoenix. That is a primarily online course with a three-month practicum at the end of the 18 months. Successful completion of the course will allow me to obtain a teacher's license in Arizona, which is transferable to other states in the US and to Canada.

ETE: Thanks very much.

**JALT2005: October 7th – 10th, Shizuoka Granship
Conference Theme: "Sharing Our Stories"**

Life is stories. The things our students learn, and the things we learn become stories we build on and use to grow as teachers. That's why *Sharing Our Stories* is the theme of the 31st annual JALT International Conference.

Stories can be the content learners think about as they, for example, read books or do listening tasks. Or they can be the conversations students have with each other. Or the ideas they write. At the conference, we teachers will share our experience, ideas, research, successes, and challenges. All of these are types of stories. And, of course, the sharing is the key.

Explore the website <http://conferences.jalt.org/2005/>.

Our forum at the 2005 JALT Conference (7th-10th October) has been confirmed.

Presentation number: 653

Title: Can language and culture go hand in hand?

Format: Forum

Day: Sunday 9th October

Time: 13:05 – 14:40 (85 minutes)

Room: 902

The JALT Pan-SIG 2005 Conference: Lifelong Learning

Michelle Segger, Kinjo Gakuin University, <michelleinj@yahoo.com>

The JALT Pan-SIG 2005 Conference was held at Tokyo Keizai University on May 14th and 15th. The conference was sponsored by the Gender Awareness in Language Teaching, Pragmatics, Teacher Education, Teaching Children, Teaching Older Learners, Testing and Evaluation SIGs as well as the West and Central Tokyo chapters. It was a very busy couple of days with 50 presentations and 6 colloquia planned, as well as a forum, poster sessions and a plenary speech on each day. I have chosen three presentations that I feel demonstrate the diversity of presentation techniques and ideas shown over the weekend.

Saturday's plenary speaker was Dr Michael Bostwick of Katoh Gakuen. His presentation was entitled *Myth versus reality: What we know about early language learning*. Katoh Gakuen is unique in Japan, in that the Japanese school curriculum is taught, but most subjects are taught in English. Katoh Gakuen has been using this 'immersion' approach to second language teaching for 14 years. When we entered the room there was a handout on each chair. This rather crowded piece of A4 had all the critical information that was presented in the presentation - essentially making the presentation itself superfluous. I believe that Michael is an exceptional public speaker. However the choice to give a bilingual presentation was not a good one. Most of the audience were clearly native English speakers. Also he had to constantly cut off his flow and hand over to the translator who then repeated the same information in Japanese. This was not only slightly tedious, but led to timing problems and he was forced to rush towards the end and cut his points short. A third criticism I have is that this particular presentation was not pitched appropriately for the audience. It would have been more appropriate for parents who are prospective customers of Katoh Gakuen. Having said all that, he brought together and summarized the research (to which Katoh Gakuen and Michael have added) on Early Language Learning in an easy to digest way. I suspect that he was also unhappy with the bilingual approach and I hope that next time I will have the opportunity to listen to an excellent public speaker.

Later in the afternoon I attended Tim Newfields' *Structured incomprehensibility- Learning from the Redundica simulation in EFL contexts*. I particularly enjoyed the method of this presentation. Tim used the [Six Thinking Hats](#) which was developed by De Bono in the mid 80s. He used the six thinking hats to introduce and make us think about Redundica. This is a commercially available foreign language simulation package. Delegates were asked to add redundancy to their speaking by using two verbs with a similar meaning every time they needed a verb in a sentence. It was surprisingly difficult, not only in that it affected one's

fluency, but also showed how the listener can have problems when listening to a non-fluent speaker. It also made us all feel very self-conscious about our speaking. We used the six thinking hats to consider our reactions to it and to discuss its uses. Most delegates felt that it had limited use in the TEFL classroom. One worry was that students are already well aware of their feelings of inadequacy. However, some delegates thought it may be useful to get students to try Redundica in their first language so they could better understand the difficulties the native speaker has when listening to a non-fluent conversation partner. It would also be valuable to get teachers to use it occasionally so that they do not lose contact with the challenges that students face. There were also some suggestions on how, in certain circumstances it may have benefits, such as expanding the vocabulary of higher level students. Although many participants felt that Redundica had limited uses in the classroom, the style of presentation was entertaining, made the delegates actively participate and also reminded us of the challenges that many of our students face in the classroom.

Finally, *The psychology of difficult students* by Curtis Kelly ended my day. He focused on those students that are bored, uninvolved or even disruptive in the classroom. He outlined four theories of growth which all focused on the 'needs' of students. The one he concentrated on was Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Curtis had simplified this to 4 needs.

Self-Actualization Needs
Social Needs
Safety Needs
Physical Needs

This is a kind of pyramid of needs, with self-actualization (which includes education) at the top; meaning that all needs below it must be satisfied in order to focus on self-actualization. He suggested that many students in our classes are still trying to satisfy their social needs and are therefore unable to focus on what is going on in the classroom. This clearly struck a chord with most of the delegates. Usually students who are not attentive are indeed concerned with socializing - chatting to classmates or malingering on their phones. Curtis suggested that to fight this hierarchy is a losing battle. His method of choice is to allow those students who are focused on social needs to remove themselves from the classroom so they can get on with what concerns them, while gaining a credit for the course. This method is to be admired; it must result in enviably motivated classes. However, surely students who are focused on actualization, and are completing all the requirements for the class, are likely to feel some annoyance that students who do not care about the class still get the credits. I also suspect that the administration in many institutions would have a negative reaction to such a practice. Although I had some reservations about the solution to the problem of unmotivated students, I was very impressed with the notion that we should not regard these students in a

negative way and I finished my Saturday thinking how best to deal positively with those students who were struggling with their social needs.

Links

For more information about Katoh Gakuen:

<http://web-japan.org/nipponia/nipponia16/sp05.html>

For more information about DeBono's six thinking hats:

<http://members.optusnet.com.au/~charles57/Creative/Techniques/sixhats.htm>

For more information about Redundica:

<http://nipporica.com>

For more information about Maslow:

<http://web.utk.edu/~gwynne/maslow.HTM>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs

Be published in *Explorations in Teacher Education!*

Guidelines

Articles – sharing your research with other teacher educators. Up to 3000 words.

Essays – your opinion or ideas about a topic relevant to teacher educators based in Japan. Up to 2500 words.

Stimulating Professional Development series – teacher educators are often quite professionally isolated. Write up about your teacher education activities, and the institutions that you work in. See previous issues for examples. Up to 3500 words.

Conference Proceedings – did you give a great presentation recently? Write up your presentation. Up to 2500 words.

Conference Reviews or Conference Reports – did you attend an interesting conference? Share your thoughts with the TE SIG members. Up to 2500 words.

Book Reviews – have you recently read an interesting book related to teaching, teacher education, language acquisition, or education? Up to 2000 words.

Font: Arial 11 point, single spaced, one line between paragraphs, SINGLE space between sentences.

Notes: Please include a catchy title, your name and professional affiliation, an e-mail address to go at the top of the article, and a 75-100 word bio-data for the end.

Deadlines: ongoing. Submit by e-mail to Simon Lees <simich@gol.com>. Attach as a Word document, titled with your surname, such as 'croker.doc' or 'robins.doc'.

Also, please cut and paste your article into the body of the e-mail, in case the Word document does not open.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Editor if you have any questions or ideas.

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A network of foreign language instructors dedicated to becoming better teachers and helping each other teach more effectively, the TE SIG has been active since 1993. Our members teach at universities, high schools, and language centres both in Japan and other countries.

The TE SIG focuses on five areas: action research, teacher reflection, peer-based development, teacher motivation, and teacher training and supervision.

If you would like further information about the TE SIG, please contact:

TE SIG Coordinator, Anthony Robins <anthonyrobins@yahoo.com>

Explorations in Teacher Education

Newsletter of the Japan Association of Language Teachers

Teacher Education Special Interest Group (TE SIG)

Submission Guidelines:

See inside back cover

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